

3rd April 2005. Easter Two

Rob Lamerton

Readings:

Acts 2:14, 22-32

Psalm 16 - page 234

1Peter 1:1-12

John 20:19-31

Some years ago, I worked with a priest who would not say much about special events of speakers on Sundays — he said he wanted people to be surprised and to go and tell others "you'll never guess what happened at church today!"
keep people intrigued and coming back!

The situation in the gospel reminds me of this!

The disciples gather "on the first day of the week,"
doors locked for fear of the Jews...

they show surprise as Jesus stands among them

Peace be with you — *shalom*

The Lord shows his wounds

Disciples rejoice

"Peace be with you"

He breathed on them:

"receive the Holy Spirit"

If you forgive sins — they are forgiven

If you retain — they are retained...

BUT Thomas is absent

So... the other disciples tell him,

"We have seen the Lord"

They might have said — Guess what happened when we met to pray and break bread — The Lord was there.

Desire to share the good news with their friend

Desire to care for Thomas and keep him "in the loop" — Pastoral Care

How often are we concerned about those who are NOT HERE! For whatever reason.

In THomas' case it is Doubt.
But the group persist
And because they do...

and because Jesus is also concerned for the doubter and the absent
Thomas comes to faith.

**But the whole story is really about faith
Not about seeing and touching.**

The whole point of the story is to encourage those
"who have not seen"

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

In John's telling of the story it is the Risen Christ who bestows the Spirit.

Whereas the Spirit is the breath of God in Creation, in this story the Breath of God (the Spirit) is
breathed by the Risen Christ — NEW CREATION

This is a passing of the baton, the handing of authority to the disciples —

WHAT FOR?

The forgiveness of sins — That whole issue which was so central to what Jesus did is now to be
the responsibility of his disciples.

You will recall that Jesus was in trouble over forgiving sins because the Jews said only God can
forgive sins.

Jesus was called a blasphemer because he forgave —

Jesus also taught in the Lord's Prayer:

forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us

and to Peter he said to forgive seventy times seven times.
Forgiveness is at the heart of Jesus' ministry.

So now why does he say:

"if you retain the sins of any they are retained."

**and the more I ponder it, the more I think he is pointing out the negativity of retaining sins —
in other words: How dare you NOT be agents of God's forgiveness and healing.**

It may be that [really] is about those who do not enter into the spirit of forgiveness — lack of
repentance.

A couple of years ago Archbishop Peter Carnley who was Archbishop of Perth and Anglican Primate, stirred up some response when he wrote an article about Jesus the crucified one being the forgiving one — but this seems to me to be making the point that in him, God's forgiveness is made available //to break through the ongoing cycle of hatred and violence// — and it has to be this forgiveness which guides our mission.

Finally, Jesus forgives Thomas' negativity and doubt. The Lord is always reaching out in spite of our attitudes! here we see it with Thomas who though offered the experience of touching the wounds does not need to.

He believes — He has believed on the story of his and he now knows that the Lord is Risen by his personal experience.

But the point of the story according to the author (John) is that faith is NOT about seeing; it is NOT about proof. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

We meet today — we do not see the Lord
but we have some reference points:

STORIES — scriptures

ACTIONS — in the breaking of the bread
and the sharing of the cup... handed down.

EACH OTHER — community of faith - God at work in each of us

SPIRIT — prayer

and in them we know the presence of the Risen Christ:

to bring peace

to breath his spirit

to call us for mission

to declare his forgiveness

I wonder if any of us will say:

"Guess what happened in Church today!
We have seen the Lord!"

Have we?